

[W. E. Heard]

1

Folkstuff And Folkways - Range Lore [?] Words

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by

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Page 1

232

Pioneer Experiences

and Cowboy Tales of Early Days UVALDE COUNTY, DISTRICT #10

W. E. HEARD

as told to

The Sabinal Sentinel, Sabinal Texas.

One of the most interesting conversationalists to be found hereabouts who went up the trail and served as a cowboy in the early days, is W. E. Heard of Sabinal. His knack of story telling brings his keen humor into play and he remembers the humorous incidents in the right place as he tells his story. Having gone up the trail five times , one may be sure he will have thrilling stories to tell.

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He was born June 15, 1864, in Arkansas and after serving twenty years as a cowboy in West Texas, he left the ranch to take up life as a storekeeper as a partner with his brother. He was bookkeeper of their hardware firm for a number of years.

In 1836, he was married to Miss Lena Biggs of Utopia, daughter of Ben Higgs. He continued actively in public life taking six of his sister's children to rear.

After his wife's death, he remained in town and married Miss Hannah Jacobson of Wisconsin December 31, 1922.

He has been mayor of Sabinal two terms the past several years and is hearty and full of life as he takes an active interest in public affairs.

The following account of a trip up the trail was written by him a few years ago. C12 - 2/11/41 - Texas

2

"Having heard so much about hard times and depression, it takes me back to '87 which would make the present time look like six-bits. I think some of the old timers will bear me out in this statement, that they planted a crop in the spring of '87 and it came up in the spring of '88.

"I was working on a ranch in Nebraska when I recived a letter from my brother, W. D., with whom I had left some horses to pasture, telling me to come and get them as they were starving to death. 'Bee Tree, and 'Turkey Roost' water holes had gone dry, something that had never been heard of before. Well, like all cowboys, I was 'broke' but I had a private horse so the boys all chipped in and bought my horse, then [out?] him up and played poker to see who would get him while I bought a ticket to the Sunny South.

"Arriving at Sabinal, I had just three-dollars and sixty-cents left. I bought a coffee pot, a frying pan and a few groceries which came to three dollars, leaving me with sixty cents.

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Then we proceeded to round up the horses and, in the meantime, I related my financial condition to my brothers and they gave me the 'horse laugh' and told me I was well fixed. One of them said, 'I want to give you an idea of the financial condition of this country at the present time. I was in Uvalde a few days ago when one of the wealthiest ranchmen in the Frio Canyon walked into his brother's store and asked him for ten dollars. His brother said, 'I haven't got it, but I will see if I can get it for you,' so he went out in town and had to borrow from three different men to get it.'

"Well, hope springs eternal in the human breast. I had a friend at Leakey who had a few old ponies and was going with me. He had been teaching school and as all school teachers had money I was sure he would too, so it would all work out O. K. after all. We got the horses rounded up and reached the Hackberry waterhole the first night. The next morning when we went to turn the horses out, we found a little baby pinto colt just a few hours old. When I pulled out my pistol to shoot it, my brother said, 'Don't do that!'

3

We will have trouble with the mare all day and maybe lose her,' so being an obedient kid I spared the colt. Going up the Frio that day the colt got in swimming water three times but got out and made it to Leakey that night.

"Leakey being our playground, the boys got up a big farewell dance for us. That night when they passed the hat around to get a few nickles for the fiddler, they caught me sitting by a young lady and not having the nerve to show my colors, I dropped in fifty cents and tried to look as cheerful as though I had a hundred. Of course I was much impressed with the old adage that he who dances must pay the fiddler.'

"The next morning my friend informed me that he did not have a red cent; said he had a twenty dollar school voucher that he couldn't even trade for dry goods to say nothing of cash or groceries. Well, after our night of dissipation, of course , we got off late and several of the boys went along to give us a good send-off and as we didn't get very far by

Library of Congress

noon, they stayed with us for dinner and ate up the last crumb we had, but we made it to the Bell Ranch that night and found a hearty welcome, plenty of good eats, a hospitality you seldom find now-a-days. The next morning we had a mess of dry grits. Going on up the river one of our best mares slipped down and never could get up. Well, we made it out to the divide that night, found lots of grass, but no water. We talked a Mexican sheep herder out of enough eats for supper and breakfast 'such as it was.' The next morning we had another big mare down and couldn't get her up. My friend said, 'That's hard luck.' I said, 'It's two less to drive.'

"Going on down Paint Creek, we found a little bunch of horses which meant there was water there somewhere, so we took their trail and found a little rock waterhole. In this little bunch of horses there was a mule with a bell on and my friend said, 'There is a five dollar reward for that mule down on the Neuces,' so we rounded up the horses and I roped the mule, we took the bell off and put it on one of our horses and he took the mule and 4 beat it for the Nueces. When he arrived at the brief end of his journey, infact he had reached the object, point and goal of his desire, his fond anticipations were not fully realized for the Bo-hunk of the lomas (hills) that claimed the mule , could not raise but four dollars. Well, he said to himself, 'A half a loaf is better than no bread ,' so he took the four dollars.

"In the meantime, I left the horses at this little waterhole and drifted on down the creek to where my old friend, John Avant, had a sheep ranch. There I found a hearty welcome, plenty of good eats and a very charming young lady, so I was somewhat unconcerned about friend's return. When my friend returned some two or three days later, we went down to the mouth of the creek where he had some relatives and spent the night with them. The next night we reached Junction City where we spent some of our four dollars for eats.

"In the meantime I had written the foreman on the ranch in Nebraska to send me thirty dollars P. H. to Coleman City. We learned later that our best route did not go by Coleman City but by Ballinger, so arriving at Ballinger, which was the end of the railroad, we just had

Library of Congress

enough of our four dollars left to buy me a ticket to Coleman. When I arrived in Coleman it was night and not having the price of a bed, I counted the stars from an empty wagon box. It is needless to say that I was up early interrogating the first man I saw as to the location of the post-office. He informed me that it was Sunday and that the post-office would not be open only to throw the mail out to the bus driver to take to the train some two miles away. When the door opened, I butted in and asked for my mail, and hurriedly opening the letter I was looking for, I found a thirty-dollar money order which the honorable postmaster refused to cash without identification which was, of course, impossible. Being put to my wits' end, I did some deep thinking. In the meantime, I asked the bus driver to wait a minute. It finally dawned on me that I had on an old white shirt (not very white either) on the tail of which my washwoman had stamped my 5 name, so I proceeded to display my cola de camies (shirt tail); also a monogram which my little Yankee sweetie had put in my hat the Christmas before. Well, I finally convinced the gentleman that I was the rightful owner so he handed me out the long green. Rushing out, I discovered the bus driver some hundred yards away, which was very unkind to say the least. I don't know whether the milk of human kindness had dried up in his bosom or whether he become suspicious that something was wrong. Be that as it may, I gave chase and finally got aboard, a little short of wind but a little longer onfinances. Reaching camp, my friend and I had a big jubilee.

"A few days later we camped at Margaret, a little town in Hardemen County, and the next morning we had another baby colt but it was not so peppy as the little pinto so we decided we had better sell the mare and colt. We failed. However, an old man with his glasses on the end of his nose, who had a little grocery store said, 'I'll give you twenty dollars worth of groceries for your mare and colt,' Well, we accepted, feeling somewhat elated over the fact that we, at least, had plenty of eats for many days. 'But all is not gold that glitters.' Too much groceries and not having a regular packsaddle, we hurt the packhorse's back which necessitated a change so we decided to put the pack on a halter-broke mare. All went well until the pack got a little to one side which evidently did not suit this broomtail kayuse so she decided to relieve herself of some of the burden. With a few bucks and snorts she got

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it on the opposite side from where it belonged. Then she made a little semicircle of some three or four-hundred yards. It was quite laughable and not so damn funny either to see your good eats flying-through the air in every direction. But we finally got her lassoed and determined not to be outdone,, we gathered up what we could find, put it back on her and necked her to the one with the sore back, then set off again.

“A few days later we camped on a little creek in Kreer County, the disputed territory. It was my friend's night to stake his horse, but the 6 next morning we found that the horse had pulled up the pin and was gone. There we were forty miles from nowhere, afoot. Well, we got around the bunch, got them in a little bend of the creek, where there was a bluff on one side and my friend said, 'Heard, its up to you. I can teach school but I can't rope a bronc! Well, as most of the bunch were broncs, to swing a rope meant 'adios' (goodbye), so it was just 'duck or no dinner.' Friend ran the horses by me and after plowing up terra firma for some thirty or forty yards with a boot heel, I succeeded succeeded in getting the brute from a state of migration to a stationary orbit which ended our troubles for the time at least.

“All went well then until we reached the South Canadian River which was full of quicksand and very treacherous but we thought, to follow some cowboys who were putting a bunch of festive bovines across, we could make it. Well, we were getting along fine until the only poor , weak animal we had left got out of line and went down, and when she went down, a blue smoke went up, but we hurried the bunch across and went back to get the old thing out, if possible. We would get one leg out and by the time we could get another one out that one would be back in, but we stayed 'mit' until we got her out and across, looking like she had been pulled through Hades and beat with a soot bag. However, going on up the road a few miles we came to a little ranch owned by a window. Convinced her that we had a very fine animal but just a little too poor for us to fool with, we sold her, thus relieving ourselves of some anxiety and adding a little more of the filthy lucre to our depleted money bag.

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"A few days later, we arrived at Montezuma, a new town, also a new settlement, people having come from the east and settled on this bald prairie in Western Kansas. There we happened to meet up with a good fellow who told us if we would stay there a few days we could sell some horses. Well, we stayed there some three or four days and sold some horses. Eight or ten head. There were no corrals except a little wire pen by the side of the livery stable, but we always had 'speck-taters' enough to line the fence so we got by. When we would sell one we put a hackamore on it, took it out on the prairie and tied it to a sack of sod as there wasn't a bush in forty miles of there. As there were no fences, we had to herd our bunch day and night. One morning while I was trying to untangle one of these kayuses which we had sold, my friend went to sleep and let the horses get in an old farmer's wheat patch. Now this ol guy had an enclosure around his house and barn and by some 'hook or crook' he got the whole bunch in there and when my friend woke up and found them and went up to get them, the old man said, 'You owe me one dollar per,' which meant some thirty-five or forty dollars.

"Well, being the Judas Escariot, carrying the money bag, they came looking for me. Thanks to my Irish wit one time in life, I said, 'We are strangers here and not familiar with the laws in Kansas but we are willing to do the right thing, so you fellows go down town and ask some lawyer or justice of the peace and if that is correct, come back and I'll pay the bill.' No sooner then they were out of sight, I beat it up and turned the horses out and got them on the opposite side of town, then went back to where I was. So, when they found me they informed me that the charge was correct and demanded the money without any further argument. Then it was my time to talk. I says, 'Listen, on a matter of fact there is no damage. You know that, as the horses only walked across one corner of your wheat patch. You are just trying to hold up a couple of kids and we don't propose to be held up but, just to show you that our hearts are in the right place we will make you a present of two dollars and fifty cents. You can take that or go where they don't shovel snow, make your choice.' Learning by that time that he did not have the horses in his possession, he chose the former. By doing so he may have gotten both.

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"Well, we had a good many miles to go yet. We thought perhaps we had better be on our way. Taking a farewell look as we were leaving town, we saw several of those Texas kayuses still tied to the sack of sod where we left them some three or four days before. The owners never have been able to get to the sacks much less the bronc. Well, we patted each other on the back that we got away from there with a pretty nice roll of the long green and didn't get held up either.

"On the third day of July we arrived at the South side of the Arkansas river. The next morning we went over to town to get a broiled t-bone and they told us there was going to be a big ballgame there that day, Kansas City playing Garden City, so we decided to take a day off and stay and see the game. And believe me, that was some ball game! I don't think I would be exaggerating to say that the ball was never on the ground from start to finish and unless my eyes deceived me the catcher took the ball from in front of the bat two different times. You know Kansas was a prohibition state even that far back and we, being rank strangers, had considerable difficulty in getting the 'pass word' but after we finally succeeded, everything went very smoothly from then on the balance of the day. Mind you, we saw the ball game before we got the 'pass word.'

"Going back the next morning to get our horses we found that our little pinto colt had gotten into the wire fence and cut one leg off. Well, when I pulled my pistol to shoot it, my friend said, 'Don't do that, we will have trouble with the mare all day and tonight we will lose her; it (the colt) will keep up.' Well, I spared it. The poor little thing went on dragging on one leg and finally got well, and when it was two years old I sold it for thirty dollars, which was my reward for obedience.

"Our trip was uneventful until we crossed the B. and M. (R.R.) in Nebraska. We camped on a little creek and went back to town to get some groceries. Going back to camp, as we crossed the railroad, we heard a train whistle—the first one since we left Ballinger. My friend said, 'Let's go by the depot.' He got off his horse, unsaddled him, threw his saddle on the 9 platform and turned his horse loose. I said, 'Hold on now, old sport, what's the [?]?'

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He said, 'I am going back to Leakey.' Well, I knew he had a sweetie back in Leakey, but I didn't know it was eating on him like that. But I soon found that 'moral swasion' was of no avail, so he went back to Leakey. I went on driving the remainder of the horses some two hundred miles alone, arriving at the ranch on the twenty-third day of July just ninety days from the time we left Leakey.

"Relating the little incident to my sweetie as to how I got the money order cashed, she clapped her hands and says, 'You owe me the best horse in the bunch.' 'Well,' I says, 'I never owed anybody anything that I wouldn't pay, so pick out your horse.' So she picked out one and I delivered it to her, pending further developments. A little later, I learned that she had two other sweeties besides me so I demanded the return of my Arabian steed instante which she did with the declaration that I was radically wrong. 'Well,' I says, 'you are a mighty cute little Yank but you can't put anything like that over a Texas Bo-hunk. I'll go back to where the girls are not so fortunate as to have three sweeties at one time.'

"In [?], I went back to Kansas to look after some 2,800 head of cattle for [?]. H. and George A. Kennedy and riding over some of the hills that my friend and I had gone over, naturally I thought of said friend, so I got a beautiful posted picture of Eureka, Kansas, the place where we were making our headquarters, and mailed it to my friend at the last place I had heard of him, which was Kaufman County. In a few days, I recived received a letter from him in San Antonio asking me to write him a long letter, and not to go through 'San Antonio' on my return trip without stopping to see him. It so happened that we passed through San Antonio in the wee hours of the night, so we did not stop. However, we were back through in a few months and walked into his place of business. He looked up, bid me the time of day and asked if there was anything he could do for me. I asked him if he could direct me to the 10 Chrysler Garage as I wanted to have some work done on my car. He said he could not. I then asked him how long he had been living in San Antonio? He said about two years. I asked where he was from and he answered, 'California. Previous to that I lived in Kaufman County. And at one time I lived in Edwards County around Leakey.' I asked him if he knew any of the Heard boys. He said that he did, that he went 'up the

Library of Congress

trail' with W. E. I then asked him if he knew what became of W. E. He said, 'The last time I heard of him he was looking after cattle in Kansas. He promised to stop and see me on his way home but he has not shown up yet.' I said, ' Would you know him if you could see him?' He said, 'Oh yes.' I said, 'Well, you are looking at him.' So we had another big jubilee, minus the 'Oh be Joyful' which we had in Garden City, Kansas, on the fourth of July forty-four years ago."